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## Defence Chief Urges Improved Management of Major Projects

July 19, 2025

— Categories: Defence & Security



Australia's defence chief, Admiral David Johnston, has called for urgent reforms in managing large-scale defence projects to curb cost overruns and delays, emphasizing efficiency in taxpayer spending. Speaking to ABC News, Johnston highlighted the need for the Department of Defence (DoD) to sharpen its oversight of complex initiatives like the \$45 billion Hunter Class Frigates, reinforcing Australia's military readiness amid global tensions.

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) faces mounting scrutiny over its handling of multi-billion-dollar projects, with the Hunter Class Frigates program, set to deliver its first ship in 2032, drawing criticism for escalating costs and prolonged timelines. Johnston told ABC News, “We need to do better,” acknowledging systemic issues in project execution (). The AUKUS agreement, involving nuclear submarines, adds pressure to streamline processes, as alternatives like U.S.-controlled submarines were deemed unviable. Johnston stressed that while submarines are critical, the ADF’s broader capabilities—such as long-range strike systems and northern infrastructure—are equally vital for national security.

Cost overruns and delays reflect deeper challenges in defence procurement, with the DoD’s bureaucratic structure often blamed for inefficiencies. The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) reported a \$17 billion funding gap in the defence equipment plan, exacerbated by inflation outpacing budget increases (). Johnston’s push for reform aligns with calls for greater accountability, as seen in posts on X urging the hiring of professional project managers (@GScarafaggio,). Defence Minister Richard Marles echoed this, admitting historical delivery challenges and signaling potential bureaucratic reforms to enhance efficiency ().

The ongoing Exercise Talisman Sabre 2025, showcasing ADF capabilities, underscores the urgency of Johnston’s call. With over 35,000 troops from 19 nations participating, the exercise highlights Australia’s military strength but also the need for reliable project delivery to maintain operational readiness. As global threats evolve, efficient management of defence projects is non-negotiable to ensure taxpayer funds deliver maximum security outcomes. Johnston’s frank admission signals a commitment to change, but success hinges on

decisive action to overhaul outdated processes and prioritize strategic investments.